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SUBJECT: AIT DIRECTOR AND NOBEL PRIZE WINNER LEE

Classified By: AIT DIRECTOR STEPHEN M. YOUNG FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶11. (C) Summary: Taiwan Nobel Prize winner Lee Yuan-Tseh told AIT Director he felt that the PRC's policy of only talking with the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) was unequivocally wrong. While disappointed with President Chen's performance, he also criticized the KMT for its dealings with the PRC. He will step down as Academia Sinica President in October, but will continue doing research in Taiwan. End summary.

LEE: TAIWAN PEOPLE FED UP WITH PARTISAN BICKERING

¶12. (C) During AIT Director Young's initial call on Academia Sinica President and Nobel Prize winner (chemistry 1986) Lee Yuan-tseh on April 14, Lee said that the people of Taiwan were tired of bickering between the KMT and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). He thought this would lead to a popular backlash against incumbent politicians. Looking towards the next presidential election in 2008, Lee said that KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou's squeaky-clean image may not overcome the KMT's long history of corruption in Taiwan politics. Ma's support level is high right now, but Lee doubted this would translate into support for the KMT. Lee felt that former (and currently the honorary) KMT chairman Lien Chan typified Pan Blue politicians who want to maintain their privileged status. He said mainlanders (i.e., residents of Taiwan born in Mainland China) felt threatened by the rise of democracy in Taiwan and wanted to use KMT-PRC links as a means of keeping power.

¶13. (C) As for DPP prospects, Lee said that because the public is unhappy with the current situation, anything is possible. While Premier Su Tseng-chang is thought to be a good candidate for the DPP in 2008, Lee thought that a KMT candidate like Wang Jyng-ping might be able to garner support from DPP voters.

HOPE FOR TAIWAN'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

¶14. (U) Lee said that science education in Taiwan is doing well, noting that many non-profit organizations sponsor student training programs to promote science, and that physics ranked no. 2 in popularity as a subject at the National Taiwan University. Lee said he had contributed to educational reform efforts early in the Chen Administration. He had hoped that by offering more choices on text books and different tracks to enter universities the system would move away from being "test-centered." Unfortunately, he said, his

educational reforms plans have been criticized as having increased student workloads considerably.

PRC POLICY OF ONLY TALKING WITH KMT WRONG

¶15. (C) As a Nobel laureate and respected educator, Lee's support on policy issues is often sought by both the ruling and opposition parties. PRC officials have also sought Lee's views and support for their policies. Lee has access to a wide range of people on cross-Straits issues. Deng Xiaoping, Lee said, once asked Lee why the DPP was promoting independence. Lee explained that this was a reaction to oppression by the KMT. According to Lee, Deng thought the issue of reunification was best left to the next generation to solve. The Director asked Lee's opinion of PRC Party Secretary Hu Jintao, whom Lee had met at an APEC meeting in

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¶2004. Lee thought Hu a more capable person than former Party Secretary Jiang Zemin and said Hu understood the problems

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created by the disparity of wealth in China.

¶16. (C) Lee said the PRC leadership thought that talking only with the opposition party would benefit their goal of unification and thus they have refused to negotiate with the Chen Administration. Lee said that, when President Chen was elected in 2000, Chen asked him to become the chairman of a nonpartisan committee that would open channels with the mainland. But such opportunities were lost when the PRC authorities shunned the Chen administration. Lee said his access to China's leaders has generally been good. Lee noted he had attended two APEC leaders' meetings (in 2003 and 2004) at the President's behest but that he was no longer involved in APEC.

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COMMUNISM AND NATIONALISM

¶17. (C) Lee cited a colleague from Academia Sinica who observed that the PRC rule in China is even more corrupt than was the KMT rule in Taiwan. The Director said that Taiwan should be confident about its democratization and predicted that a future more democratic Mainland China could change the current calculus of cross-Straits relations for the better. Lee felt that the PRC government was inciting nationalistic feelings (particular against Japan and the United States) to the detriment of its neighbors.

NEED TO STAY ENGAGED TO KEEP U.S. SUPPORT

¶18. (C) The Director told Lee he had met with Ma Ying-jeou, Wang Jyng-ping, James Soong and others and had told them that conflict between the KMT and DPP about the defense procurement bill could have negative effects on the long term relationship with the U.S. Lee agreed that Taiwan should work on national defense and do so in the people's interest and not for partisan political reasons.

FUTURE PLANS: STEP DOWN AND STAY

¶19. (C) Lee said he will step down as head of Academia Sinica in October, but he would remain on staff and conduct research on biomass energy. Note: A week later at an environmental meeting, Lee spoke in favor of continued use of nuclear energy. End note.

¶10. (C) Comment: Lee appeared guarded in his views of the DPP and President Chen. He has clearly been disappointed by Chen's performance, but sees equally skeptical of policy

choices the Pan Blue might adopt should they win in 2008. Because of his status as a Nobel Prize laureate and respected scholar, Lee's views and actions still carry weight in Taiwan's political environment.

YOUNG